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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

14 July 1987

China: Renewed Emphasis on Population Control

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Summary

A rise in China's birth rate has recently caused Beijing to place renewed emphasis on population control policies. We do not foresee the adoption of more coercive methods, but believe that Beijing will seek to strictly enforce existing family planning regulations. Beijing has acknowledged that abuses such as forced abortions still exist in some areas, but Chinese leaders are making a concerted effort to eliminate them through education and training. At the same time, we believe Beijing is trying to deflect international criticism of its population control policies by stressing China's adherence to legal means and by demonstrating a new openness in discussing this sensitive subject. Zhao Ziyang's recent speech may, in fact, have been intended in part to clarify China's family planning policies in response to indications of continuing concern from the United States.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Office of East Asian Analysis. It was prepared at the request of the Agency for International Development. Information available as of 13 July 1987 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Political Assessments Branch, China Division,

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Renewed Emphasis

Population control continues to be an important part of China's overall economic modernization plans. Premier and Acting General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Zhao Ziyang recently addressed the need for family planning in a speech for the special television program "The Day of the Five Billion" jointly sponsored by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and the Turner Broadcasting System. In his speech Zhao said that China must control its population growth in order to modernize, make efficient use of resources, and eliminate poverty. Zhao said that China hopes to keep its population to about 1.2 billion by the end of the century.

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We believe Zhao's speech may presage a new campaign to strictly enforce family planning policies.

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We cannot be sure if Beijing intended to send a signal to US officials. The emphasis in Zhao's speech on centrally set policies, regulations, and plans for the implementation of family planning measures, as well as his pointed remark that family planning in China is voluntary, may have been calculated to demonstrate Beijing's intent to control population growth through orderly and legal means and to deflect accusations concerning coercive methods such as forced abortions. Similarly, the release of statistics by the State Family Planning Commission concerning abortions performed in China last year may signal a new openness in an area Beijing has found particularly sensitive. We believe that it is unusual for Zhao to take time from his busy schedule to give such a speech, and if Beijing were to respond to an oblique overture from the United States, we believe it would use just such a circuitous means to do so.

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Beijing does face an increased birth rate which could jeopardize its 1.2 billion target, according to statistics released by the State Family Planning Commission on 8 July. Despite the continuation of a one-child-per-family regulation, the birth rate last year was almost 2.1 percent, higher than in the preceding three years. Beijing attributes this rise to the increased number of women reaching marriageable and childbearing age, as well as negligence on the part of family planning officials in some areas.

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Looking Ahead

Although we do not foresee the adoption of more coercive family planning policies, we believe that Beijing is taking steps to tighten the enforcement of existing policies, which in the past few years have been relaxed by adding to the list of conditions under which a family can have a second child.¹ We believe some of these conditions may be redefined or even eliminated. Also, Beijing may pressure local officials to be more vigilant in enforcing policies in rural areas where peasants have circumvented policies and had a second child, and in some cases even a third, according to state and press reporting [redacted]

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In defiance of central guidelines, such tightening of controls in the past has resulted in more abuses at the local level. The director of China's State Family Planning Commission recently acknowledged that some local family planning officials continue to resort to coercive measures to meet quotas. Beijing has stressed that family planning officials who order forced abortions or use other forms of coercion will be punished [redacted]

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To the extent that resources exist, we believe that Beijing has tried to prevent such abuses by educating and training local officials in the approved methods of implementing family planning policies. Compliance with these policies is better in urban areas where the population is better educated. In less developed and poorer rural areas, however, Beijing still faces a largely uneducated populace, shortages of resources, and inadequately trained family planning cadre who sometimes use coercion out of ignorance or overzealousness. In the past foreign technical assistance, administered primarily through the United Nations, has helped Beijing to establish family planning centers and supply contraceptive devices to the population. [redacted]

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¹ A variety of conditions qualify a rural couple for a second child, including remarriage, handicapped first child, minority status, and parents who themselves have no siblings. In some areas couples are also allowed to "try again" if their first child is a girl. [redacted]

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